

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

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TAGS: PFOR, SREF

SUBJECT: ARTICLE ABOUT SOVIET LIBERALIZATION OF EXIT
VISA PROCEDURES

1. UNDER HEADLINE "SOVIETS EASE EMIGRATION", FOLLOW-
ING APPEARED JANUARY 18 WASHINGTON POST UNDER ROBERT
TOTH BYLINE:

2. QUOTE MOSCOW, JANUARY 17. THE SOVIET UNION HAS
FORMALLY EASED ITS EMIGRATION RULES SOMEWHAT, SOVIET
SOURCES SAID THIS WEEK. EXIT VISA FEES HAVE BEEN
CUT 25 PERCENT, THEY SAID, AND THE DOCUMENTATION RE-
QUIRED OF APPLICANTS HAS BEEN SIMPLIFIED.

3. QUOTE TWO JEWISH ACTIVISTS, WHEN QUESTIONED,
CONFIRMED YESTERDAY THAT RECENT APPLICANTS HAVE BEEN
CHARGED 100 RUBLES (133 DOLLARS) LESS FOR THEIR VISAS
AND THAT ONE NEW APPLICANT WAS TOLD HE NO LONGER HAD
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TO PROVIDE THE ONEROUS "CHARACTER REFERENCE" WHICH

CREATED DIFFICULTIES IN THE PAST.

4. QUOTE THE JEWS CAUTIONED THAT THE CHANGES MAY HAVE LITTLE REAL IMPACT ON EMIGRATION, HOWEVER. THE TWO ACTIVISTS AND A WESTERN DIPLOMAT SUGGESTED THE MOVE WAS "TOKENISM" TO COMPLY WITH THE EUROPEAN SECURITY CONFERENCE DOCUMENT SIGNED IN HELSINKI LAST AUGUST BY 35 NATIONS, INCLUDING THE SOVIET UNION. SIGNERS PLEDGED COOPERATION IN VARIOUS AREAS, INCLUDING HUMANITARIAN FIELDS.

5. SOVIET SOURCES SAID A NUMBER OF RULE CHANGES WERE APPROVED BY THE GOVERNMENT IN LATE DECEMBER. TERMED "ADDITIONS TO RULES" ON EMIGRATION, THE CHANGES REPORTEDLY HAVE BEEN PRINTED IN A GAZETTE OF GOVERNMENT DECISIONS.

6. QUOTE SO FAR, COPIES OF THE PUBLICATION FOR THAT PERIOD ARE UNAVAILABLE, SO THE PRECISE WORDING OF THE NEW REGULATIONS COULD NOT BE OBTAINED. THE SOVIET SOURCES SAID THE MOST SIGNIFICANT PROVISIONS ARE:

-- -A CUT IN VISA FEE FROM 400 TO 300 RUBLES (533 DOLLARS TO 400 DOLLARS AT THE OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATE).

-- -SIMPLIFICATION OF THE DOCUMENTS REQUIRED OF APPLICANTS. THE JEWISH ACTIVISTS SAID ONE APPLICANT WAS TOLD THIS WEEK THAT HE NEED NOT PROVIDE THE "CHARACTER DOCUMENT WHICH HAD TO BE SIGNED BY HIS BOSS, HIS TRADE UNION CHIEF AND THE PARTY LEADER WHERE HE WORKED. ONLY A CERTIFICATE TESTIFYING TO HIS WORK PLACE AND SIGNED BY HIS BOSS WAS NOW NECESSARY; THE MAN WAS TOLD BY A COLONEL IN THE MOSCOW VISA OFFICE.

-- -VISA APPLICATIONS WILL NOW BE GRANTED OR DENIED BY LOCAL VISA AUTHORITIES. IN KIEV, FOR EXAMPLE, THE CITY VISA OFFICE WILL PASS ON THE APPLICATION FIRST, RATHER THAN THE UKRAINE INTERIOR MINISTRY AS IN THE PAST.

-- -APPEALS FROM REFUSALS CAN BE MADE TO HIGHER VISA OFFICES AND THOSE WHOSE APPEALS ARE DENIED ARE TO HAVE UNCLASSIFIED

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THEIR CASES REVIEWED EVERY SIX MONTHS INSTEAD OF EACH YEAR.

-- -THERE ARE THREE GROUNDS FOR REFUSAL: IF APPROVAL IS AGAINST "THE STATE INTEREST", IF IT ADVERSELY AFFECTS PUBLIC MORALS, OR IF IT HARMS THE RIGHTS OF CITIZENS REMAINING IN THE COUNTRY.

7. QUOTE ALSO SIGNIFICANT IN A BROADER SENSE IS THAT THIS SO FAR AS IS KNOWN WILL BE THE FIRST TIME THAT RULES FOR EMIGRATION ARE OFFICIALLY SPELLED OUT. UNTIL NOW, A FORMAL LIST OF THE DOCUMENTS REQUIRED FOR AN EXIT VISA WAS UNAVAILABLE. IT IS BELIEVED THAT THE ONLY FORMAL RULE COVERED THE "EDUCATION TAX" ADOPTED IN 1970 BUT LATER SUSPENDED AFTER WESTERN CRITICISM, AND IT MAY BE THAT THE NEW CHANGES ARE "ADDITIONS" TO THAT RULE.

8. CHRON THE TWO JEWS WHO CONFIRMED THAT SOME EMIGRATION REGULATIONS HAVE CHANGED, DR. ALEXANDER LUNTZ AND ANATOLI SHCHARANSKY (SIC), HAVE SOUGHT VISAS FOR A LONG TIME. THEY WERE DOUBTFUL ABOUT THE EFFECT OF THE NEW REGULATIONS.

9. QUOTE "THIS WILL MAKE THE PROCESS OF COLLECTING NECESSARY DOCUMENTS EASIER", ACKNOWLEDGED SHCHARANSKY (SIC). GETTING RID OF THE CHARACTER REFERENCE MEANS BYPASSING TWO FORMIDABLE FIGURES--THE PARTY CHIEF AND THE TRADE UNION LEADER.

10. QUOTE "BUT I THINK THERE WILL STILL BE DIFFICULTIES" HE SAID. "THE BOSS CAN SPREAD THE WORD THAT A MAN HAS APPLIED TO EMIGRATE, THEREBY TRIGGERING HARASSMENT AND EVEN FORCE HIS RESIGNATION LONG BEFORE HIS APPLICATION IS EVEN SUBMITTED", HE SAID.

11. QUOTE A WESTERN DIPLOMAT INFORMED OF THE CHANGES, ALSO SAW THEM AS "TOKENISM" TO HELSINKI AND SUGGESTED THAT THE DECENTRALIZATION PROVISION "BUILDS IN A TIME DELAY THE SOVIETS CAN USE TO FEND OFF REFUSEDNIKS" (PEOPLE DENIED EMIGRATION PERMISSION). UNQUOTE

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12. DEPARTMENT WOULD APPRECIATE EMBASSY'S CONFIRMATION OF OR COMMENTS ABOUT MATTERS REPORTED IN ARTICLE.

13. DEPARTMENT PRESS GUIDANCE ON THIS STORY HAS BEEN SENT BY SEPTEL. IN RESPONDING TO QUESTIONS, EMBASSY OFFICERS SHOULD FOLLOW THIS LINE. KISSINGER

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